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TESTIMONY OF MONTANA WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF

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Contact: Jim Brown Director of Public Affairs and attorney Montana Wool Growers Association 406-443-2211

- Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee
- My name is Jim Brown, I serve as the public affairs director for the Montana Wool Growers Association
- The Montana Wool Growers Association is the Association which represents the sheep industry in Montana.
- It goes without saying that as much as any organization in Montana has an interest in this issue, the Wool Growers Association has a vested interest in the proper management of wolves in Montana.
- This is because sheep and wool producers in Montana are on the proverbial front lines of wolf-livestock conflicts, and experience the true impact of having the wolf on the Montana landscape.
- As an example of this, this Committee will recall that one of our members lost more than a 140 sheep in a single wolf kill incident in 2009. A newspaper article reporting on that event is attached herewith for review.
- That incident cost of the State of Montana over \$50,000 in compensation payments, and cost our producer years of breeding, blood lines, and loss of confidence in the management of wolves in Montana.
- With this in mind, as you can imagine, the Montana Wool Growers Association strongly opposed the reintroduction of the "expiremental" wolf population in Montana during the middle 1990s.
- It was easy for our membership to envision the wildlife management problems
 that would come along with the unnatural reintroduction of this species into
 Montana, and the cost that would be incurred by Montana's farming and ranching
 communities as a result of the presence of the wolf near 'our' livestock
 operations.
- Despite the fact that our concerns were pushed aside and minimized at that time, our predictions as to the tremendous 'cost' of having the wolf present in Montana in large numbers has borne out, as is evidenced by today's hearing.
- With the above in mind, the MWGA has always viewed reintroduction of the wolf as the imposition of an unfunded mandate by the federal government on the citizens of the State of Montana and on Montana's government.
- MWGA has also believed that management of wildlife is a proper and traditional function of state government, and is protected as such by the 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution.
- MWGA strongly supports this resolution because it calls on the federal government to do what is right and what is required. That is, it calls on the federal government to remove the wolf from the endangered species act and to

- turn management of the wolf population located within the State of Montana to the State of Montana, where it constitutionally required to be.
- As this Resolution indicates, Montana's wolf population long ago satisfied the criteria for delisting. It has been almost a decade since the 30 breeding pair, 300 population criteria was met.
- Yet, here we are in 2011 with wolves still being managed by the federal government under the ESA, despite two separate determinations that the State of Montana has an adequate wolf management plan.
- This result is primarily caused by the incessant litigation by so-called environmental organizations that places wildlife management in the hands of unaccountable federal judges instead of the hands of state wildlife management agencies.
- This aforementioned problem can be addressed by what is being called for in Representative Milburn's bill. That is, Congress must enact, and President Obama must sign into law, legislation that delists wolves in this State and that turns management of the wolf population over to the citizens of this State.
- Having state control of the wolf population is the only way to mitigate the damage being done to the livestock industry generally, and to the sheep industry specifically, by the presence of these predators on Montana's landscape.
- The reality is this wolf management is not a partisan issue. Proper management of wolves is a Montana issue.
- Regardless of ones political ideology, there is one thing that a majority of Montanans of all political persuasions agree upon. That is, it is time for the State of Montana to assume management of wolves, and it is time for the legal shenanigans of so-called environmental groups to end.

MWGA SUGGESTIONS:

All this being said, MWGA does recommend that this resolution be amended to include a statement that the federal government should be financially responsible for bearing a portion of the cost of wolf management in Montana given that the federal government is responsible primarily for the reintroduction of the wolf in Montana.

- This would redress the unfunded mandate problem mentioned earlier in my testimony.
- In addition, this legislature has an opportunity to pass meaningful legislation to mitigate the damage done by wolves to Montana's sheep producers and to ensure proper management of the population.
- MWGA is advancing legislation that would do the following:
- (a) ensure that the Livestock Loss and Mitigation Board has a steady stream of funding that ensures that Board is able to carry out its mission to prevent livestock-wolf conflicts and to compensate livestock producers for losses caused by reintroduction of this predator;
- (b) ensure that FWP actually follows its statutory duty to collar all wolf packs in Montana;

- (c) ensure that 'problem' wolves are eliminated, thereby ensuring the health of other forms of huntable wildlife populations in Montana; and
- (d) by ensuring the Board of Livestock directs a proper portion of the per capita funding to predator control efforts.
- We encourage the members of this Committee to support and cosponsor the following MWGA legislation:

LC1454	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft Request Received	12/05/2010	Ensure control	multiple use of state lands under of FWP
LC1455	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft in Final Drafter Review	01/10/2011		e hunting license fees to fund k loss reduction mitigation fund
LC1456	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft to Requester for Review	01/02/2011	Provide	for use of wolf license money
LC1731	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft in Assembly/Executive Dir Review		07/2011	revising laws related to wildlife population management funding
LC1732	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft Ready for Del	ivery 01/	10/2011	Collection of wolf hides for benefit of livestock loss reduction & mitigation
LC1733	Not Assigned	Requester	(C) Draft to Requester Review	for 12/2	27/2010	Provide liability protection for owners of livestock protection dogs

CLOSING

- Again, the membership of the MWGA strongly supports this Resolution.
- We thank Speaker Milburn for recognizing the problems caused by keeping wolves located in Montana under the mandates of the Federal Endangered Species Act and for moving this Resolution forward.
- MWGA looks forward to working with this Committee and with the members of the 2011 Legislature on issues that protect the health of Montana's largest economic engine the agriculture industry.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Brown

On behalf of MWGA's membership

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Wolves kill 120 sheep at ranch near Dillon

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HELENA - While the debate about how many wolves are enough to ensure a healthy population will again come to a head in a federal courtroom Monday, a Dillon-area ranch is picking up the pieces from the largest known wolf depredation in recent history.

In a highly unusual move for wolves, they killed about 120 adult male sheep in one incident on the Rebish/Konen Livestock Ranch south of Dillon last week.

That compares with a total of 111 sheep killed by wolves in Montana in 2008, according to Carolyn Sime, the statewide wolf coordinator for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

"This is one of the most significant losses that I've seen," Sime said. "That situation is really unfortunate."

Suzanne Stone with Defenders of Wildlife added that in the 20 years she's been working toward ensuring healthy wolf populations, this is the first time she's heard of such a mass killing.

"I've heard of bears or mountain lions doing that, but what usually happens is the sheep panic and jump on top of one another or fall into a ditch and suffocate," Stone said. "I've never heard of any situation where wolves killed so much livestock in such a short period of time.

"... This is the most extreme case I've ever heard about."

The ranch has suffered confirmed wolf depredations twice in three weeks. In late July, three wolves - two blacks and a gray - killed at least 26 rams. The gray wolf was lethally shot by a federal wildlife manager, and one of the blacks was injured. They thought that would scare off the rest of the pack.

Last week, wolves struck again. This time, they took out 120 purebred Rambouillet bucks that ranged in size from about 150 to 200 pounds, and were the result of more than 80 years of breeding.

"We went up to the pasture on Thursday (Aug. 20) - we go up there every two or three days - and everything was fine," rancher Jon Konen said. "The bucks were in the pasture; I had about 100 heifers with them on 600 acres."

He had some business to attend to in Billings, so Konen told his son to be sure to check on the livestock while he was gone.

"He called me, and said it was a mess up there. He said there were dead bucks all up and down the creek. We went up there the next day and tried to count them, but there were too many to count," Konen recalled.

"I had tears in my eyes, not only for myself but for what my stock had to go through," he added.
"They were running, getting chewed on, bit and piled into a corner. They were bit on the neck, on the back, on the back of the hind leg.

"They'd cripple them, then rip their sides open."

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has taken the lead in wolf management from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, and the state agency has a "memorandum of understanding" with the federal Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services to provide damage management services when livestock are killed by wolves.

After the dead sheep were found, Graeme McDougal with Wildlife Services flew in a small plane over the sheep pasture, looking for the one or two remaining black wolves to complete the control work requested by Montana FWP. Within a half-mile of the sheep pasture, he spotted the Centennial pack of three adult gray wolves and five pups.

McDougal shot and killed the one uncollared adult wolf, but wasn't authorized to remove any more wolves.

This was the first known depredation incident for the Centennial pack in 2009.

Konen doesn't want to wade into the debate over the reintroduction of wolves in the Rockies, but said that in his opinion, it's time to stop managing wolves and start controlling them.

"My bucks were on private ground, in a pasture where we've been pasturing them for 50 years. The wolves were intruders that were in the wrong place," he said.

Wolves were recently taken off the list of animals protected under the Endangered Species Act, and both Montana and Idaho have instituted hunting seasons for them this year. Idaho will allow 265 wolves to be taken by hunters, in a season that starts Tuesday. Montana will allow 75 wolves to be taken, with the season starting Sept. 15.

Montana is home to an estimated 500 wolves, while Idaho has at least 850. Wyoming also has wolves, but they remain under Endangered Species Act protection.

In Stone's opinion, hunting wolves could create even more problems for ranchers.

"If the adults are shot, then the young ones are dispersed too early," Stone said. "Young pups on their own might turn to livestock to survive, and that's not a good situation for anybody."

Her organization has put out a book to educate ranchers on proactive steps they can take to prevent livestock loss, like hiring range riders, hanging "fladry" - closely spaced cloth - on fences, and minimizing attractants such as dead carcasses.

Defenders of Wildlife has spent more than \$895,000 since 1998 to help pay for installation of nonlethal methods to prevent conflicts.

Since 1987, they've also made 885 payments totaling \$1.35 million to ranchers to compensate for livestock killed by wolves.

In Montana, the Legislature has earmarked \$150,000 to compensate ranchers for livestock lost to wolves, and U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., co-sponsored a bill that includes \$5 million in federal funding over five years for depredation losses.

George Edwards, state livestock loss mitigation coordinator, said the Rebish/Konen Ranch probably will receive \$350 per dead sheep.

But he added that the loss is more than just monetary to ranchers.

"The compensation still doesn't make up for the loss by any means," Edwards said. "The rancher still needs to make up his breeding stock, and people in town may not realize the attachment livestock folk get to their animals. The emotional toll it takes is just indescribable."

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